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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1044
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001513

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/06/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PM CHIEF OF STAFF TARIQ ABDULLAH VISIT TO
WASHINGTON

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel V. Speckhard fore reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (S) Summary: Prime Minister Chief of Staff Dr. Tariq Abdullah discussed his upcoming trip to Washington May 6-10 with the DCM in a series of meetings on April 29 and May 2. Dr. Tariq outlined the concern among Prime Minister Maliki's inner circle that the U.S. views Iraq through a sectarian lens, and explained why he does not anticipate a breakthrough in neither resolving the legislative logjam nor building a stronger unity government. De-Ba'athification is a misplaced priority of the U.S., asserted Dr. Tariq. At Dr. Tariq's request, DCM shared suggested themes for his meetings in Washington. End Summary.

12. (C) Prime Minister Chief of Staff (COS) Dr. Tariq Abdullah will visit Washington from May 6 to May 10, accompanied by Political Advisor Ambassador Sadiq Al-Rikabi and an executive assistant. They have requested meetings with State, the NSC, DOD, and an intelligence analyst. Iraqi National Security Advisor Rubaie will also be in Washington during the same time period on a separate trip.

THE US IS "NERVOUS" WHEN DEALING WITH SHIA

13. (S) Dr. Tariq will bring with him to Washington concerns that Washington does not recognize the PM as a non-sectarian leader. He will share his nervousness over efforts by regional governments to orchestrate the installation of a new government. He will need reassurance that we have the Maliki government's best interests at heart. "It seems that the U.S. government is looking at the situation in Iraq through a sectarian prism," stated Dr. Tariq in a frank exchange with the DCM. "Maybe it is because historically you have only dealt with Sunni governments, and the sectarian atmosphere of the region is making the U.S. government very nervous to deal with Maliki," continued Dr. Tariq. "If we can get over this, then our relationship will be successful."

14. (S) The DCM has assured Tariq that "you are misjudging the US." While we have serious concerns about Iranian influence and behavior, it is our interest in seeing Iraq succeed that is our priority. We are focused on whether the government can reduce violence through reconciliation and by taking advantage of the surge in security forces to advance the political agenda.

FUNDAMENTALS OF THE LEGISLATIVE LOGJAM

15. (C) Dr. Tariq believes that our focus on legislative agenda misses the point of what is driving the sectarian divide and will not lead to a reduction in violence. He understands the need to move forward on the key political items, and assured the DCM that the PM was committed to the agenda. But he will assert that the Prime Minister does not have the tools to advance this legislative agenda. Dr. Tariq stated that the situation in Iraq is very unique because deep rooted enemies are now trying to share political power. As a result of the parties' narrow mindedness, he said, they debate minor items with the same vigor as major issues such as amending the constitution. In his opinion "the Prime Minister may not have a lot of room to maneuver, or ability to take the country in a certain direction."

16. (C) The problem with de-Ba'athification, said Dr. Tariq, is that until the new law comes out, the PM has no legal basis to interfere in their business. DCM pushed back, stating that while the PM cannot tell the de-Ba'ath Commission what to do, he is the executor of their orders and could, for example, instruct his ministers to not execute existing de-Ba'ath orders. Dr. Tariq agreed that this was possible, but that any public announcement would be difficult because Chalabi is using inflammatory language to create a hostile media environment for progress on de-Ba'athification.

17. (C) DCM pointed out that the Maliki government was approaching its one year anniversary and that the PM should review his original 22 point program, with an eye to identify temporary executive orders he could issue to advance that program. "This would show him to be a strong prime minister and ensure the continued support of the US," said the DCM. In fact, the prime minister should plan a campaign of executive actions that would build momentum on the legislative framework, recommended the DCM.

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STRENGTH OF THE UNITY GOVERNMENT

18. (C) Dr. Tariq is skeptical that the different political blocs are negotiating in good faith, or that a true unity government is even possible. He asserts that Iraqi tribal mentality does not promote reconciliation if there is a perception that blood was spilled between the parties. Asked if Towafuq will withdraw from the ruling coalition, Dr. Tariq replied "they will if you give them the green light." DCM relayed that the President had called Vice President Al-Hashemi to underline the importance of staying in the government." The DCM asked about strategies to strengthen the government's coalition. Dr. Tariq stated that he had offered to meet with senior exiled Ba'ath party members in Syria, but "they don't want to talk - they want you dead." DCM pressed that Washington needs to see the prime minister make efforts to create a coalition of support that is broader than just the United Iraqi Alliance. DCM cautioned that the government's only chance is to make big, bold moves that will build confidence in the Iraqi people and the American public.

RECOMMENDED THEMES FOR WASHINGTON

19. (S) We recommend that Washington raise the following issues:

--Ask what the PM is doing to increase the participation of Sunnis and Kurds in real decision-making.

--Discuss recent steps towards reconciliation, including any that show momentum on de-Ba'athification reform.

--Explore steps the PM could take this summer to show progress on the legislative framework.

LOGISTICS

¶10. (C) Political Advisor Ambassador Sadiq Al-Rikabi will travel on his UK passport and enter under the visa waiver program. Dr. Tariq and Executive Assistant Hajer Al Rekabi (a tribal but not direct relation to Sadiq) will enter on valid multiple entry A-2 visas.
SPECKHARD